

A Hubbell in the White House?

In the winter 1850-51 a teacher in Warrensville, Ohio began a relationship with a pupil that was open and unconcealed. The teacher was 20 year old James A. Garfield, future president of the United States and 18 year old **Mary Louisa Hubbell**. Mary (ME# 2677) was one of four children of Solyman (Lyon) Hubbell (ME# 1141), a trustee of Warrensville, Ohio and Lucinda Bell. In November 1851 James again taught school and Mary was again his pupil. She visited him at Hiram in the spring of 1852 and he made at least one visit to her home. We can be sure that Garfield considered her his future wife. She was described as bright and sprightly but in the opinion of Corydon B. Fuller, a friend and advisor of Garfield, unsuitable as a wife for such a man as Garfield.

In response to a letter from Corydon, Garfield said he was not formally engaged to her but he admitted a relationship and that people considered them engaged. He was concerned that people would view him as a man who trifled with the affections of a woman. Corydon then wrote him again and advised him under no circumstances to marry her. In a 9 April 1853 letter, Garfield explained that his heart bleeds for "that poor girl". But Garfield said that although he felt a great obligation for her sympathy, kindness and affection should these considerations "curb my career?"

The relationship ended and many people severely censured him for his decision. As early as 1855 he sought to recover the letters he had written to Mary. He asked his cousin, Henry Boynton, to visit her. Henry wrote that Mary was at home but her father had told her not to give up her letters, that there was enough in them to "prove all they want". Mary Louisa married William Taylor in 1858 and in the same year, James married Lucretia Randolph. James A. Garfield became the twentieth President of the United States 4 March 1881 only to be assassinated 200 days later. Letters of James to Mary are now in the Library of Congress. When received in the library they were carefully bound with correspondence with other girls and labeled "Miss".

Sources:

Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Index to the James A Garfield Papers, Washington DC 1973, Kate M. Stuart.

Reminiscences of James A Garfield with notes Preliminary & Collateral by Corydon E. Fuller, Chapter IX.